

WorkFirst Time Limit Extensions

January 2005

What are the time limits for receiving cash assistance?



Federal law requires a five-year lifetime limit on cash assistance but allows states to exempt up to 20 percent of their caseload from that cutoff. In Washington some WorkFirst families would receive cash benefits beyond the five-year limit. WorkFirst policies were made stronger, most recently in January 2004, to ensure parents are fully participating in the program's work requirements.

How might a parent receive cash benefits longer than five years?

- **Exempt** – Parents who cannot or should not be expected to work are exempted from time limits. They include those who:
 - Care for a child 3 months old or younger.
 - Are 55 years or older and caring for a needy relative.
 - Have a severe and chronic disability (including parents likely to be approved for Supplemental Security Income or other federal disability benefits).
 - Are required to be in the home to care for a child with special needs or an adult relative with a disability.
 - Qualify for a temporary hardship extension due to issues such as family violence, medical conditions, mental health, or substance abuse treatment.
- **Full-time Participation** – Adults who are participating full time in work or work-related activities and otherwise abiding by WorkFirst requirements may continue to receive benefits as long as they continue that effort.
- **Child SafetyNet Payment** – Parents who refuse to participate even though they are able get a reduced grant called a Child SafetyNet Payment made directly to a contracted third party (protective payee) who assures the funds are used to meet the basic needs of children in the family.

What happens when a parent reaches his or her five-year time limit?

Before a parent reaches his or her 60th month on cash assistance, a mandatory case staffing is conducted. The staff familiar with the parent's circumstances meet to identify issues that are keeping the family from getting off welfare. Based on this meeting, a new Individual Responsibility Plan is created with the parent. Extensions of the time limit are granted on a temporary basis and are reviewed every six to twelve months.

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- In December 2004, fewer than 4,000 parents have been on TANF more than 60 months, which is about one-third of the federally allowable 20 percent limit, or only 7 percent of the entire caseload.
 - Projections show that Washington is unlikely to reach the federal cap on time limit extensions within the next several years.

Program contact:

Amber Gillum
(360) 725-4612
gilluae@dshs.wa.gov

For more information about the

WorkFirst program, visit

www.workfirst.wa.gov

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